

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-10

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E.O. 11652: N/A
TAGS: PGOV, PINT, IS
SUBJECT: REPERCUSSIONS OF THE OFER SUICIDE

REF: TEL AVIV 0053

1. AS THE SHOCK OF HOUSING MINISTER AVRAHAM OFER'S SUICIDE RECEDES OBSERVERS HAVE BEGUN TO CONSIDER ITS POTENTIAL POLITICAL IMPLICATIONS. PRIME MINISTER RABIN IS REPORTED TO BE PREPARING A REPORT OF EVENTS LEADING UP TO THE SUICIDE FOR SUNDAY'S CABINER MEETING. INTEREST CONTINUES TO CENTER ON WHAT OCCURRED IN THE "SECRET" MEETING OF SATURDAY, JANUARY 1 AND IN OFER'S MEETING WITH RABIN THE FOLLOWING DAY (PARA 3 REFTEL). IN HIS EULOGY AT OFER'S STATE FUNERAL ON JANUARY 5 RABIN QUOTED OFER AS INSISTING AT THE SUNDAY MEETING THAT HE WAS NOT GUILTY OF ANY TRANSGRESSION. RABIN SAID THAT HE REPLIED, "AVRAHAM, I BELIEVE YOU." NONETHELESS, IT WAS KNOWN THAT OFER FELT INCREASINGLY SNUBBED BY HIS COLLEAGUES. FOR EXAMPLE, HE WAS DEEPLY DISAPPOINTED WHEN HAIM BAR-LEV

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WAS RECENTLY NAMED ELECTION CHAIRMAN FOR THE LABOR PARTY, A JOB OFER HAD COVETED AND EXPECTED.

2. MEANWHILE, A DEBATE IS EMBERGING ON WHETHER THE POLICE INVESTIGATION SHOULD CONTINUE. THE POINT HAS BEEN MADE THAT AN INVESTIGATION OF A PERSON UNDER INDICTMENT (OFER HAD NOT BEEN INDICTED) IS DROPPED WHEN THE SUBJECT

DIES AND THAT THE CRIMINAL INVESTIGATION OF A DEAD MAN IS PATENTLY UNFAIR BECAUSE HE CANNOT ANSWER TO THE CHARGES. ON THE OTHER HAND, APART FROM THE FAMILY'S UNDERSTANDABLE DEMAND THAT OFER'S NAME BE CLEARED, AMNY ARGUE THAT THE MATTER IS A PUBLIC AFFAIR AND, PARTICULARLY BECAUSE OF THE INVOLVEMENT OF THE LABOR PARTY AND THE IMPENDING ELECTION, THE INVESTIGATION MUST RUN ITS COURSE. AGAINST THIS BACKGROUND, MINISTER OF POLICE SHLOMO HILLEL HAS ANNOUNCED THAT THE INVESTIGATION HAS BEEN "SUSPENDED" AND WOULD RESUME ONLY ON INSISTENCE OF THE ATTORNEY GENERAL.

3. OFER'S SUICIDE NOTE (WHICH INEXPLICABLY WAS GIVEN TO THE PRESS EVEN BEFORE THE FAMILY HAD READ IT, AND THEN PUBLISHED IN FULL) STOUTLY PROCLAIMED HIS INNOCENCE BUT EXPRESSED HIS DESPAIR OF BEING ABLE TO COPE FURTHER WITH THE "PERSECUTION" AND "SLANDER." IT HAS EVOKED CONSIDERABLE PUBLIC SYMPATHY ALONG WITH A TENDENCY TO GIVE HIM THE BENEFIT OF THE DOUBT. THIS COMPASSION WILL PROBABLY NOT PREVENT THE LABOR PARTY'S IMAGE FROM SUFFERING FURTHER DAMAGE - PARTICULARLY AS THE TRIAL OF ASHER YADLIN GETS UNDER WAY. YADLIN, LIKE OFER, GREW UP IN THE LABOR PARTY, WAS ONE OF ITS STALWARTS, AND IS CHARGED WITH CRIMES SIMILAR TO THOSE OF WHICH OFER WAS ACCUSED. INDEED, THE POSSIBILITY OF A LINK IN THE TWO CASES HAS BEEN THE SUBJECT OF SPECULATION.

4. THE OFER AFFAIR WILL UNDOUBTEDLY AFFECT RABIN'S CURRENT STRUGGLE TO RETAIN HIS POSITION AS HEAD OF THE LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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LABOR PARTY AND GOVERNMENT. HIS OPPONENTS IN THE PARTY (READ PERES) CAN ARGUE THAT THE OFER AND YADLIN AFFAIRS MAKE A CHANGE IN LEADERSHIP IMPERATIVE, IF THE PARTY IS TO ESCAPE THE STIGMA OF SCANDAL AND RETAIN ITS ABILITY TO MANAGE ISRAEL'S AFFAIRS. IN THIS REGARD, EBAN'S CRITICISM THAT RABIN REPELS POLITICAL PARTIES AND PERSONALITIES HAS BEEN RECALLED. OFER'S SUICIDE IS ONE MORE, ALBEIT EXTREME, EXAMPLE.

5. ALTHOUGH THE LABOR PARTY IS NOW AFFECTED BY RE-CRIMINATIONS AND GUILT FEELINGS AND THE OFER TRAGEDY WILL HAUNT THE LEADERSHIP FOR A LONG TIME, IT MAY ACT AS AN ADDITIONAL SPUR TO NEW EFFORTS AT REJUVENATING THE PARTY AND PULLING IT TOGETHER - ACTION THAT HAS BEEN EXPECTED IN ANY CASE IN VIEW OF THE APPROACHING PARTY CONVENTION AND THE KNESSET ELECTION. BUT TALK OF CHANGE INHERENTLY FAVORS RABIN'S OPPONENTS. PERES AND EBAN CAN INSIST ON A NEW TEAM OR FRESH FACES, WHEREAS RABIN CANNOT DO SO WITHOUT DISAVOWING THE LABOR MEMBERS OF HIS OWN

CABINET, SEVERAL OF WHOM ARE CONSIDERED TO BE LESS THAN
OUTSTANDING.
DUNNIGAN

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